



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

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To: Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee

From: Julie Kushner, UAW Region 9A Director

Re: SB 948 AAC Smoking in Workplaces

My name is Julie Kushner and I am the Director of UAW Region 9A. I am here on behalf of over 2,200 UAW members who work as dealers at Foxwoods Resort and Casino. We urge you to support Senate Bill 948 An Act Concerning Smoking in Workplaces. We support this bill because it will broaden the state's smoke free air law to protect more employees while at work.

While we are not seeking to amend this bill, we do believe a hearing on smoke free air at work cannot take place without mention of employees at Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun. These workers, should this bill pass, will be the ONLY employees in this state left unprotected by the state's smoke free air law.

There is no need for me to address the dangers of smoking or exposure to second hand smoke. Everyone involved – the employees, the managers, the Tribes and this legislature -- agrees that our state's casino workers are at risk for smoking related illnesses including cancer. What we don't agree on is what to do about it.

Two years ago, then Governor Jodi Rell and the Tribes agreed to do testing; testing that doesn't even really measure the amount of smoke casino workers are exposed to. A year ago, the union and Foxwoods agreed to do real testing and to create a, very small, but nonetheless smoke-free area on the gaming floor. Unfortunately, this part of the contract has not yet been put into effect.

We understand the complexities and the difficulties of this situation. The Tribes are concerned about revenue – rightly so. Tribal members depend on the financial success of these casinos for the livelihood and betterment of their community. Therefore, while they strongly believe they alone possess the right under tribal sovereignty to legislate this issue, they are not willing to stop smoking on the gaming floor.

The State of Connecticut is also concerned about revenue. Our state's budget relies heavily on the revenue generated at the casinos. There are some of you here in the legislature who are also uncertain of whether tribal sovereignty protects the Casinos from the State's interference on this issue, despite an opinion three years ago from then Attorney General Blumenthal to the contrary.

We know that there is uncertainty about what to do about smoking at the casinos. But there is one thing on which we can all agree: every year that goes by without action by this legislature or the Administration or the Tribes – a certain number of workers will get sick and die – simply because they make their living working at one of our state's two casinos.

If we live in a civil society, we have a responsibility to protect these workers – all of whom are Connecticut residents and taxpayers just like you and me. It is simply immoral not to be doing everything in our power to protect them. We cannot turn our collective heads, wring our hands and say we are not concerned. That is not a solution.

Our union and our members at Foxwoods respect tribal sovereignty. We bargained a contract, the first union contract, under tribal law. We appreciate the efforts that the leadership of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation to accept and protect the rights of employees to form unions at their gaming enterprise. We are also working to build a constructive relationship with the management of the Enterprise. But, we know that we will not be able to win a smoke-free casino through collective bargaining. There must be a global resolution – a resolution that commits both casinos in the State of Connecticut.

In closing, we are here today to strongly urge you to pass SB 948 because all workers deserve to be safe and healthy at work. We are also here to remind you that thousands of workers at Connecticut's casinos go to work everyday knowing they may very well be the next to die.

Thank you.

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